

The Social Side of Learning Disabilities

By Arlene Harris

Student Characteristics	Learning Examples	Implications	Strategies
Intelligent and Creative	Learns well in a multisensory environment with support and nurturance of his/her abilities; thinks of atypical solution; often views issues from unusual perspectives	Requires stimulating subject matter	<p>Ask about learning interests</p> <p>Use literature, poems, humorous anecdotes for listening activities</p> <p>Take a trip to the local library; follow up by drawing a picture of what you learned</p> <p>Engage in problem solving by asking guiding questions without providing answers</p>
Highly motivated when s/he understands the specific learning disability	Seeks learning environments; requests homework; discusses what s/he needs for learning to occur; perseveres	Requires on-task focused activities	<p>Get to work quickly without wasting time</p> <p>Structure activities with several opportunities for reinforcement of skill/knowledge learned</p> <p>Provide different ways for the skill/knowledge to be learned (multisensory experiences)</p>
Disorganized	Misplaces belongings, homework schedules, often late, doesn't finish tasks	Requires structure	<p>Use organizers, like folders, sectioned notebooks, daily/weekly calendars</p> <p>Make daily "To Do" lists with space to check off completed items</p> <p>Itemize belongings used at a particular time or activity</p>
Unpredictable attention span	Quickly goes "off task" when unsuccessful; complains that activities are "boring"; interrupts group work	Requires brief activities	<p>Present lessons in manageable chunks concluding with an activity signaling the end</p> <p>Itemize the morning's activities with the time each begins and ends</p>

Limited Retention	Forgets to perform tasks; frequently asks for repetition of comments/directions; repeats words to self while reading "silently" (subvocalizes); forgets sequences of events in conversation/stories	Requires multisensory chunks	<p>Use visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactual experiences in all activities ("show, say, do")</p> <p>Task analyze a skill to be learned, sequencing each step in developmental order</p> <p>Write or have the student write directions/information to be learned</p> <p>Ask the student to repeat what s/he has heard</p>
Slow to process	Doesn't answer questions; stares into space; repeats what's just been said; appears confused when another question is asked before first one is answered	Requires time to think	<p>Count silently to "10" before rephrasing the question or asking another student to answer</p> <p>Tell classmates that everyone has "time to think" of an answer</p>
Poor language on demand	Uses many words and explanations to make a point; offers functional definitions (what an item is used for, not what it is); difficulty remembering names, dates, one word answers, misnames items	Requires training in "main idea"	<p>Give a famous quotation and ask for the meaning in one or two sentences</p> <p>Display a picture and ask for the main theme in one phrase or sentence</p> <p>Say a word and ask what it "equals" (synonym) in one or a few words; if the word given is a noun, the answer must be a noun</p>
Verbal and inquisitive	Loves to discuss question and ponder with others; relates interesting, often humorous stories; notices detail and specifics without tying them into an integrated whole	Discusses information to be learned	<p>Use small discussion/cooperative learning groups; have each member "explain" specific information/viewpoint</p> <p>Provide a "template" (skeleton outline) in which student fills in details of discussion</p> <p>Discuss and link the literal (concrete) and figurative (abstract) meanings of idioms</p>

Unaware of casual relationships	Doesn't understand links between causes and effects; can't project future consequences of actions; doesn't generalize or make assumptions and inferences from specific situations or actions	Requires "if-then" practice	<p>Describe/show a situation and stop before the end; ask the student to guess what will happen</p> <p>Ask the student to review what happened when s/he behaved well in school</p> <p>List and discuss the major category of 5 items; ask the student to add one more item to the category</p>
Unaware of non-verbal clues	Doesn't "read" others' body language; stands too close during one-to-one conversations; doesn't understand congruency between verbal and non-verbal messages	Requires practice in non-verbal communication cues	Show a picture of a person expressing an emotion; ask the student to say something as if s/he were experiencing that emotion
Makes inappropriate comments	Inappropriately comments on others' flaws; doesn't use subtlety in social situations, for example, will ask a person about a scar/disfigurement	Requires feedback	<p>Ask the student how s/he would feel were someone to point out his/her flaws (be specific)</p> <p>Ask the student why s/he mentioned the flaw; what was his/her goal?</p> <p>Tell the student how you would feel if your own flaw were highlighted</p>
Low self-confidence	Doubts ability to succeed, especially with academic tasks; doesn't understand how s/he best learns; doesn't ask for what s/he needs to complete tasks	Requires successful experiences	<p>Insure early success at tasks</p> <p>Provide individualized instruction in which the student offers his/her explanation and examples</p> <p>Ask the student to tutor a peer/younger child once the skill/knowledge is learned/practiced successfully</p> <p>Provide opportunities for students with similar difficulties to discuss their experiences</p>